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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIJING 000412

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TAGS: PREL MARR MASS CH TW

SUBJECT: MFA CALLS TAIWAN ELECTION COMMISSION DECISION ON
UN REFERENDUM A "CALCULATED PROVOCATION," REQUESTS U.S.
ACTION

REF: A. OSC/FBIS CPP20080202138008

¶B. STATE 10951 (NOTAL)

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Classified By: Ambassador Clark T. Randt, Jr.
Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) The February 1 decision by Taiwan's Central Election Commission to hold a referendum on membership in the UN under the name of Taiwan is a "calculated provocation" to cross-Strait peace and stability and represents a "significant step" toward changing the cross-Strait status quo and achieving de jure Taiwan independence, Assistant Foreign Minister (AFM) Liu Jieyi told Ambassador Randt on February 4. Should the referendum succeed, AFM Liu warned, it would "seriously harm" the peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait and the Asia-Pacific region, as well as U.S.-China bilateral relations. The United States, therefore, should take "immediate and decisive" measures, including a public reaffirmation of U.S. opposition to the referendum. AFM Liu said China hopes Secretary Rice will publicly oppose the referendum during her upcoming visit to Beijing, and that President Bush will make a public "warning" to Taiwan "splittist forces" prior to the March 22 referendum vote. The United States should also use "various channels" to urge the people on Taiwan to "resist" the referendum, prevent Chen Shui-bian from taking "unscrupulous" steps toward Taiwan independence and refrain from weapons sales to Taiwan. After reiterating U.S. policy, the Ambassador cautioned against a Chinese overreaction. The Ambassador encouraged Beijing to begin preparing now to engage Taiwan's newly elected leaders in May in dialogue designed to work toward a peaceful resolution of differences. The Ambassador took the opportunity to deliver ref B points on Sudanese support for Chadian rebels (septel). End Summary.

MFA EXPRESSES CONCERN OVER REFERENDUM

¶2. (C) The "Chen Shui-bian authorities'" February 1 decision to go ahead with a "so-called" referendum on joining the UN in the name of Taiwan is a "calculated provocation" to cross-Strait peace and stability, Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jieyi, speaking under instruction, told Ambassador Randt on February 4 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). Reading from prepared points corresponding roughly to the February 2 statement by the State Council Taiwan Affairs

Office (TAO) (see ref A), AFM Liu told the Ambassador that the February 1 decision was done in disregard of the Chinese Government's opposition and international community's condemnation and represented a "significant step toward changing the status quo" that both the Mainland and Taiwan belong to one China. The referendum is a further step toward de jure independence and, in fact, is a referendum on Taiwan independence "in disguise." If this "plot" succeeds, AFM Liu warned, it would hamper cross-Straits relations and "seriously harm" the fundamental interests of the Chinese people, peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and Asia-Pacific region, as well as U.S.-China bilateral relations and our common strategic interests.

TAIWAN'S IMPORTANCE TO U.S.-CHINA RELATIONS

¶3. (C) Taiwan is China's biggest concern and the most serious issue in the U.S.-China relationship, AFM Liu averred. China appreciates the United States Government's repeated affirmations of its adherence to its one China policy based on the three Joint Communiques, as well as its "opposition" to Taiwan independence and the referendum on joining the UN in the name of Taiwan. The PRC appreciates the public statements made by Secretary Rice and other U.S. officials to oppose the referendum. China notes that the U.S. side has taken "some measures" to try to stop the referendum, in the process achieving "some results." Nevertheless, AFM Liu continued, the current situation shows that in pushing forward with the referendum, the Chen Shui-bian authorities are heading down a "very dangerous path" that constitutes a "serious threat" to peace across the Strait and in the region. The United States should see the "gravity" of the situation and the "extreme harm" that will result, should the referendum succeed, AFM Liu stated.

USG SHOULD TAKE "IMMEDIATE AND DECISIVE" ACTION

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¶4. (C) The United States should remain firmly opposed to the referendum, not relax and continue to exert pressure on the Chen Shui-bian authorities, AFM Liu said. He argued for "immediate and decisive" U.S. measures to check the "dangerous and risky actions of Chen Shui-bian." The United States should work with the Chinese side to "block the path toward Taiwan independence." The cross-Straits situation has reached a "critical moment," and as such, the United States and China should coordinate closely and handle the situation appropriately so as to jointly prevent a "larger crisis," AFM Liu asserted.

¶5. (C) Specifically, AFM Liu stated, China requests that the United States do the following:

-- Immediately reaffirm in a public statement its opposition to the referendum on joining the UN in the name of Taiwan and publicly state that the United States will "never accept" the "bad outcome" that would result from the decision to hold the referendum.

-- Use "various channels" to urge the people on Taiwan to fully understand the nature of the referendum and the "serious consequences" it will bring to the interests of the Taiwan people as well as to cross-Straits peace and stability. Washington should also urge the people of Taiwan to "resist" the referendum.

-- Maintain "high vigilance" and "take all necessary measures" to prevent Chen Shui-bian from taking "unscrupulous" steps toward Taiwan independence.

-- Strictly adhere to its one China policy, not enter into official or military contacts with the Chen Shui-bian authorities and stop selling weapons to Taiwan, especially

Patriot missiles, submarines and F-16 C/D fighter aircraft, so as not to send any "wrong signals" to Chen Shui-bian authorities.

-- China hopes that during Secretary Rice's visit to Beijing later this month, she will publicly state Washington's firm opposition to the referendum.

-- Prior to the March 22 Taiwan presidential election, China also hopes that President Bush will issue a "clear, public warning" to "Taiwan splittist forces."

¶6. (C) By taking the above actions, the United States will contribute in an important way to cross-Strait peace and stability, U.S.-China bilateral relations and our bilateral coordination on a range of important regional and international issues, AFM Liu declared. Again noting that Secretary Rice will visit China soon, AFM Liu said the

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current good state of bilateral relations should be maintained. Nevertheless, the United States still has the ability to do more to stop the referendum and the "splittist" activities of Taiwan independence forces. China hopes the United States can take "concrete action" to firmly defeat Chen Shui-bian's "plot." The PRC further hopes that Washington will work with Beijing to maintain cross-Strait peace and stability as well as the bilateral relationship.

TAIWAN BEARS ON PRC "SOVEREIGNTY AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY"

¶7. (C) In conclusion, AFM Liu emphasized that because Taiwan's referendum "bears on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity," Beijing "has no room to be flexible on such issues of principle." These issues of sovereignty and territorial integrity can only be decided by all 1.3 billion Chinese people, including the "compatriots" on Taiwan. China values peace and has shown restraint. Nevertheless, Beijing will not tolerate Taiwan independence and will never allow anyone to separate Taiwan from the Mainland in any name or form. The PRC will continue to watch developments closely. If the Chen Shui-bian authorities are bent on moving forward with the referendum, they must be prepared to pay a "heavy price," AFM Liu warned.

AMBASSADOR CAUTIONS AGAINST PRC OVERREACTION

¶8. (C) The Ambassador confirmed that the United States continues to oppose the referendum on joining the UN under the name Taiwan, a position we have consistently and publicly made clear at the top levels of the U.S. Government.

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Reiterating that there has been no change to the U.S. One-China Policy based on the three Joint Communiques and the Taiwan Relations Act (TRA), the Ambassador stated that we do not support Taiwan independence and oppose unilateral steps by either side to change the cross-Strait status quo. Regarding arms sales, the United States is obligated to make available defense articles that allow Taiwan to maintain a credible self-defense capability as provided for in the TRA. No one in Taiwan can mistake such sales as a signal of support for the referendum on joining the UN, to which we have clearly and publicly stated our opposition. The Ambassador cautioned against any Chinese overreaction to the referendum, noting that any overreaction would only exacerbate the situation. The Ambassador also encouraged Beijing to begin preparations now for engaging the new Taiwan leaders that will take office in May, noting that China should engage the newly elected leadership in dialogue to work toward a peaceful resolution of differences.

¶9. (C) In reply, AFM Liu said that, regarding any possible Chinese "overreaction," the most important task is to

cooperate well and maintain firm opposition to the referendum so as to avoid an outcome that would "require reactions that neither China nor the United States would like to see." On engaging the new Taiwan leadership, AFM Liu said China has long been willing to talk to "anyone" in Taiwan on the basis of the one-China principle. President Hu Jintao's comprehensive statement on Taiwan delivered during the October 2007 17th Communist Party Congress, which included mention of a peace accord, serves as China's guidance on Taiwan. Turning to arms sales, AFM Liu said China has opposed the TRA since its inception and has objected to military sales to Taiwan since they began, claiming that weapons sales "serve no useful purpose," "undermine" cross-Strait peace and stability and bear on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

RANDT